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AUTHOR Rist, Ray C.
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ABSTRACT

To understand the phenomena of academic success or failure among black children in urban ghetto schools, one must look beyond the boundaries of the individual classrooms and examine the social and cultural milieu of the school itself. Both the milieu of the classroom and the milieu of the school appear to sustain one another in a pattern of reinforcement of the presently accepted values and modes of behavior. Thus, the factors which help to establish the atmosphere of the school affect that of the individual classroom as well. Thus, a cyclincal effect occurs whereby the milieu of the school influences the learning experiences of the children, which in turn help to define the behavior and responses of the teachers and principal who have major responsibility for the general social themes present in the school. It is contended that such conditions as the negative expectations for the children, the utilization of violence on the children, the exchange of information among the teachers which allows the development of stereotypes as to performance and behavior, and the norms governing the use of classroom discipline are destructive of a humane and supportive learning milieu. (Author/JM)

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ON THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MILIEU OF AN URBAN BLACK SCHOOL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

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Ray C. Rist

Assistant Professor of Sociology

Portland State University

Portland, Oregon

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ON THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MILIEU OF AN URBAN BLACK SCHOOL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

It is neither new nor startling to indicate that there exist wide variations and gross disparaties in the educational experiences and opportunities of children in the United States. Whether those variations be the result, for example, of race, social class, geographical location, community tax base, size of the school building itself, or the competency of the teachers, the impact is such that all children do not have "equality of educational opportunity." As a result, there is a severe strain between the rhetoric of educational aims and the realities of educational achievements.

In examining these disparaties, there are several possible levels of analysis: the macro-level of institutional and bureaucratic organization on a state, city or district wide basis; the individual school; and the individual classroom. The majority of studies I have surveyed have concerned themselves either with the first or the third levels. There are numerous examinations of variations in educational tax support, pressure politics on the Board of Education, the impact of federal funding, and the change in racial composition of school districts on the one hand, and studies of pupil-teacher interaction, classroom socialization, and variations in teacher effectiveness on the other. The middle level of analysis of an individual school--its patterns of organization, its formal and informal groups, its relationship to the community and its social and cultural milieu--are the focus of much less systematic examination.

Having elsewhere analyzed the dynamics of individual classrooms in a particular ghetto school (Rist, 1970), this paper will seek to elucidate

several of the social and cultural themes manifested within that same school--Attucks School.[2] It is to be suggested that just as individual classrooms play a significant role in determining educational success or failure for the children involved, so also the milieu of the school itself influences both the motivation of the children to learn and the teachers to assist that learning process. This paper will not attempt to elaborate on all of the social and cultural themes present in the school (e.g., emphasis upon the Christian religion, upon school celebration of holidays, upon nationalism). Rather, attention will focus on those themes which appear central to any discussion of academic success or failure on the part of the students. Succinctly they are: the "ideology of failure," the reliance on violence as a means of control, patterns of reciprocity among the teachers and administrators, and the teacher exchange of information among themselves on parents and students.

Attucks School: A Brief Description

Attucks School was built in the early part of the 1960's. There are twenty-six classrooms ranging from kindergarten through the eighth grade with one special education classroom. The enrollment is slightly more than 900 students and the staff includes twenty-six teachers, a librarian, two physical education instructors, the principal and an assistant principal. Also at the school on a part-time basis are a speech therapist, social worker, nurse, and doctor, all employed by the Board of Education. Within the school, all students, staff, teachers, and administrators are black. (The author is Caucasian.) The school is located within a blighted urban area that has a 98 percent black population within its census district. Within Attucks School itself more than half of the students (55 percent) are supported in

families which receive funds from Aid to Dependent Children, a form of public welfare. On my first visit to the school (9/6/67), which occurred two days before the beginning of the school year, I made the following notes regarding the inside appearance of the building:

> All the walls on the first floor were soft colors--yellow, blue green and beige. The color scheme was to have a darker tone near the floor and then a lighter tone near the ceiling. The floors were clean and waxed. There were no noticeable marks on the walls such as skuff marks, handwriting, crayon markings, etc. The whole building appeared clean and well kept. It reminded me of walking through a modern hospital with each of the doors to classrooms being doors to large wards. The atmosphere was aseptic.

Methodology

Data to be reported upon in this study were collected during twice weekly, one and one-half hour visits to the school which began in September of 1967 and continued until January of 1970. Formal observations were conducted in the kindergarten classroom of one group of black children throughout the 1967-68 school year and again with this same group of children when they were in the first half of their second grade year. The children and the school were also informally visited four times during the 1968-69 school year.[3] During the formal visits to the school and classrooms, continuous handwritten accounts were kept of classroom activity and interaction.[4] This same procedure was also employed during visits to Parent-Teacher Association meetings and when the children were on field trips. During visits to the teacher's lounge and informal chats in the halls, no notes were kept, but were recorded as quickly as possible after the end of the conversations. In addition to observation of classroom and school-wide activities, there were also conducted a number of interviews with teachers and administrators. No utilization was made of mechanical devices during the interviews nor in observing the activities within the school.

I believe it necessary to clarify at the onset what benefits can be derived from the detailed case study analysis of a single ghetto school. First, the single most apparent weakness of the majority of studies related to urban education to date is that they lack any longitudinal perspective. That is, they fail to elucidate the development of interactional processes both within the individual classrooms and within the entire school over time. The complexities of the ghetto school and its social organization cannot be adequately discerned with infrequent one or two hour observational visits. Education is a social process that occurs continually and must be observed as it evolves through time. Secondly, I do not believe that Attucks School, with its teachers, administrators, and students is atypical from others in urban black neighborhoods (cf. both the popular literature on urban education: Haskins, 1969; Kohl, 1967; and Kozol, 1967; as well as the academic literature: Eddy, 1967; Fuchs, 1969; Leacock, 1969; and Moore, 1967). Attucks School was one of five schools available to the research team as stipulated by the District Superintendent. All five schools were visited during the course of the study and intensive observations were conducted within four of them. Observations in Attucks School produced no significant variations from the observations in the other district schools utilized in this study. Finally, with the use of longitudinal study in a single urban black school, there are enhanced possibilities of gaining insights as to how both the black students and teachers adapt to what is essentially a white, middle class value-oriented institution.

Social and Cultural Themes in Attucks School: The "Ideology of Failure"

Perhaps the single most pervasive and influential theme of the school was that very few of the students would "make it" in American society and that large numbers would not. For any number of cited reasons--lack of two

parent families, lack of parential concern, the overwhelming presence of poverty, or the lack of reading material--the teachers and the administrators of Attucks School expressed the belief that the majority of students were failures. As a consequence, the role of teacher as "teacher" became minimized for there was a fatalistic assumption that teaching really could make no impact or reverse the skid into failure.

The basis for this assumption was what the teachers and principals saw around them every day--that very few black people in American society do make it and large numbers are left out. (And one would not have to be overly pessimistic to assume that it is going to remain that way for some time to come, regardless of the optimism of "benign neglect.") Acting on this assumption, the teachers attempted to salvage some fulfillment from their role by concentrating their attention on those few students in the classes whom they believed had some opportunity to escape "the streets." Overwhelmingly in the classes observed, those few students designated by the teachers as possessing the necessary traits for mobility were the children of middle class black families trapped in the inner city due to suburban racial segregation.

The pervasive view that black schools were warehouses full of failures permeated the entire school system of the city. When interviewing the director of the apprentice teacher program for the city, he indicated that he wished for all the senior college students to have the opportunity to teach both in a "good" white school and in a "bad" black school. Likewise, one of the principals at Attucks School during the course of the study reported when asked what he believed would become of the children:

> Well, many of these children will go on. Most will finish elementary school and most of them I believe will start in high school. Some will drop out though. A few of them will finish

> high school and start college. I am trying to say that I don't think that the school is going to make that much difference. If it does, you won't really be able to say. I feel some will be successful, but most will be at the same level as their parents. Some will be on relief. Now I would say that when this generation grows up the percentage on relief (55% in the school currently) should decrease and that will be an accomplishment in itself.

In interviews with the teachers of Attucks School, themes similar to those expressed by the principal were apparent. One teacher who had stratified her children on perceived ability levels noted:

> I guess the best way to describe it is to that very few children in my class are exceptional. I guess you could notice this just from the way the children were seated this year. Those at Table 1 gave consistently the most responses throughout the year and seemed most interested and aware of what was going on in the classroom.

Of those children whom she placed at the remaining two tables, she commented:

> It seems to me that some of the children at Table 2 and most all the children at Table 3 at times seem to have no idea of what is going on in the classroom and were off in another world all by themselves. It just appears that some can make it and some cannot. I don't think that it is the teaching that affects those that cannot do it, but some are just basically low achievers.

Another teacher in the school who was interviewed expressed many of the same attitudes as the teacher above. This teacher also tracked her students by table, although she did not use numbers for table designation. Instead she gave the three tables, ranked in descending order of perceived ability, the names "Tigers," "Cardinals" and "Clowns." Of the Tigers she noted:

> Well, they are my fastest group. They are all very smart. They all feel an education is important and most of them have goals in life as to what they want to be. They mostly want to go to college.

On the Cardinals:

> They are slow to finish their work, but they do get finished. You know, alot of them though, don't care to come to school too much.

Finally, with the Clowns whom she seated at the last table:

> Well, they are really slow. You know most of them are still doing first trade work.
>
> They are very playful. They like to talk alot. They are not very neat . . . . They always want to stand up . . . . All these children too, are very aggressive.
>
> I don't think education means much to them at this age. I know it doesn't mean much to Lou and Nick. To most of these kids, I don't think it matters very much.
>
> This is just the way it goes for alot of the kids in the class. They are not going to go anywhere.

With the presence of such attitudes at all levels of the city public school system, there was a constant reiteration of the causes for the failure of so many of the students. The tag of "cultural deprivation" was utilized to explain the basis of the failures. If the source of the failure of the students was held to be outside the structural and bureaucratic domain of the school itself, then the school and its practices were not called into question. In such a perspective, teachers were encouraged to "do the best they could" and be realistic in their assessment that they really could not do much for the majority of their students. As a consequence, since students were not to be taught, but yet remained within the school for many hours each day, the task became for the teacher one of maintaining control--insuring that the students did not disrupt the smooth functioning of their own confinement.

Violence and Control

Though the appearance of the school and the silence in the halls during class periods gave the impression of a rather tranquil setting, there was an underlying current of violence in the school that was never far below the surface. Corporal punishment was administered by the teachers as well as by the principal in disregard of the rules governing the striking of

children. According to city public school regulations, no child was to be struck by anyone but the principal and then only in the presence of the classroom teacher. There appeared to be an informal agreement among the teachers that nothing be openly said about their use of corporal punishment--primarily because most of the teachers appeared to engage in the activities themselves. The teachers frequently stressed in interviews that they believed the children lacked the self-control necessary to maintain their conduct in the halls and that the threat or use of violence was necessary to keep them "on the line."

During the periods of the day when there were large numbers of children in the hallways at one time, the teachers came out of their rooms and stood by their doorways. They would carry long rattans of four or five feet in length, wrapped in white adhesive tape. There appeared to be a general assumption shared by all the teachers as well as by the principal that their implicit threat of violence was necessary to insure that the children would move in an orderly fashion in the halls. Though the use of rattans to strike the children was not observed with great frequency, there were occasions when the implicit threat was transferred into explicit violence.

> As I left the kindergarten classroom at 2:05 p.m., the bell had just rung to begin recess. As I entered the hall, two boys were fighting with one another while the teacher was hitting them both on the back of the neck with a long rattan. There was a great deal of shouting. The halls appeared to be in complete chaos. A number of the teachers were out of their rooms and using their rattans. It was evident that even with the teachers hitting the children, they were not in control of the situation.

On another occasion, though I did not observe the actual use of the rattans on the children, the mannerisms of a teacher indicated that she was not against using it on the children.

> As I walked from the kindergarten classroom towards the principal's office during the recess period, I saw several teachers gathered around a group of students. One teacher called out in a loud voice, "Okay, now stay on that line. Boy, get yourself back on that line." This she said in a rather firm and harsh voice. The four teachers by this group of students all carried their rattans and one teacher kept hitting the side of her leg with her rattan.

The control of the children was also a concern of teachers in the school during the regular class sessions.

> As I walked with several of the children from the kindergarten room to the nurse's office, we passed the room of one of the fourth grade teachers. She was standing by her desk and we could quite easily hear her shout at one of the children: "You shut your big fat mouth and keep your head on the table or I'll keep it there for you."

The teacher's periodic discussion of methods of controlling the children and the necessity for doing so appeared to indicate that they perceived the children as extremely violence prone. Thus, within the classroom, they suggested it was only their continual and persistent utilization of control-oriented behavior that inhibited the emergence of violence and the disruption of the teaching process. The grade level at which one taught for at least some of the teachers appeared to be decided upon by how well the teacher believed she could control the children.

> On the way to the teacher's lounge, Mrs. Benson introduced me to one of the special education teachers on the second floor, Mrs. Warner. The three of us began discussing the special education class in the school and Mrs. Benson indicated that she had received a minor in special education, but that she herself would not mind going back to teaching children in a regular class. She stated that she would especially like to teach kindergarten because they "were all such cute little dolls. They will do anything you want." Mrs. Benson then commented that she didn't really like to teach the second grade, "because you have to spend so much time with them individually." She said, though, that she did like the children because they were "so lovable." "They will come up and love me and hug me and want to kiss me. You know, I'm afraid to shout at them because they are so small and so cute that I'm afraid that I will make one of them cry." Mrs. Warner then commented that the warmth of the children was one of the reasons that she liked kindergarten. She then noted, "You know, girl, you will never get me teaching some of those older kids. They would just as soon hit you as look at you."

> Mrs. Benson agreed and stated that was the reason that she will never teach above the third grade level. She stated that children beyond third grade are so "tough and hard" that one can "not do anything with them."

As was the case for both the special education teacher and Mrs. Benson in expressing fear of older students, the seventh grade teacher indicated that she decided to teach seventh grade only after she knew she could "control them." Whereas the second grade and special education teachers decided not to try to cope with older students, the seventh grade teacher stated that since she could handle the students, she would rather teach them instead of the younger "cry babies."

> Mrs. Crawford indicated that she doesn't worry too much about any of the students "jumping her" because they are all so "puny." She stated that she does have one boy who gives her a lot of trouble, but she smiled and said, "He chooses to stay home a lot so I don't have to worry." One of the other teachers said, "You mean David?" and Mrs. Crawford responded, "Who else?" Then several of the other teachers began to speak about David and his brothers and sisters in the school. They also commented about his mother coming to the school and "nagging" about the grades given to her children. Several of the teachers commented that they would be glad when the children have all left the school for then they would not have to deal with the mother.

With the very young children, a different technique was occasionally utilized--that of fear of punishment in the extreme beyond the experience of the child.

> As I walked past the door to the first grade classroom, I heard the teacher, Mrs. Logan, comment to the children that she did not like to eat little boys and little girls. She stated that she is not a "mean animal." She said that she is their very best friend in the school and anytime they ever have anything to tell her or ask her, they should do so because she is their friend. She then said, "I've never eaten a little boy or girl in my whole life." Her voice then became quite harsh and she continued, "But when you want to go to the bathroom, you have to ask me, you cannot simply get up and walk out of the room."

Though the teacher indicated that she had never eaten a child and that she did not enjoy doing so, she never ruled out that it might not happen should

the children fail to ask permission for leaving the room for the restroom. On another occasion during a field trip with the second grade class to a large building downtown in the city, the teacher warned the children that they would have to stay away from the edge of the stairs or she would "throw them over the railing" to the floor two stories below. The children appeared to have no reason to doubt her word and they all moved down the stairs staying very close to the wall. Such threats as being eaten or thrown over a railing should be dismissed by an adult as hollow threats, but perhaps when one is five years old, such threats by the teacher are not believed to be in the realm of the impossible.

When a teacher was to be out of her room for any length of time, it was an accepted practice in the school for a student from one of the eighth grade classes to come into the room and supervise the children. The older child was allowed to use whatever methods necessary to maintain control in the class. The result of one such situation resulted in rather serious consequences:

> As I was about to leave the nurse's office with Brad, four young girls walked into the office, one of them crying very loudly, almost hysterically. The nurse calmly walked over to them and asked what was the matter. One of the girls not crying explained that this girl had just come back to school after an eye operation and that a big girl in the classroom had hit her with a stick. The child that had been hit was in the first grade. The child was bent over and I could not tell what damage had been done to the eye. As I shortly walked back to the kindergarten classroom, I passed the first grade room. I looked in through the window and observed a very large eighth grade girl walking around the room indiscriminately striking the children with the rattan. Almost all of the children were out of their seats and making attempts to keep out of the reach of this large girl. Several of the children were crying, one boy was holding the back of his neck and a girl was holding her arm. The older girl continued to stalk around the room attempting to reach the children to strike them. She was shouting for them to "shut up," "sit down" and "git back in your seats." I entered the room and as I did, the teacher from the room across the hall followed me. She dismissed the eighth grade student and told the first grade students to get ready for recess. Several of the children were sobbing.

When the teacher dismissed the eighth grade girl, she did so without rebuke. The teacher merely indicated that the girl could leave as it was time for recess and that she would now take the children out to recess with her own class. The situation in itself was apparently not perceived as warranting any admonition by the teacher.

Older children were also used to control younger children in other ways. The eighth grade boys were the school patrol boys who not only had the responsibility of helping the children in crossing the streets safely before and after school, but in maintaining quiet and order in the halls of the school during lunch period. During the lunch period, two teachers were assigned to the playground along with four patrol boys. There were also four patrol boys assigned to the inside corridors of the school. These boys were observed pushing smaller children in the halls as well as forcing them out of the halls onto the playground. The patrol boys on the playground had the responsibility along with the teachers of lining up the children by grade before they could re-enter the school after a recess or lunch period. The patrol boys would push ans shove the children into lines on the playground and then shove them as they began to walk inside. (All the children marched double file into the school with the younger grades first, girls before boys.) The children in the upper grades were also used as lunchroom monitors to supervise the younger children as they ate. No teachers were assigned to lunchroom duty. Supervision was assumed by the cooks, the older children, and the physical education instructors, with the principal occasionally present. The violence system of the school was a hierarchical one with all teachers and principal able to exercise violence against any children and the older children against the younger. At least some of the children recognized this, for in conversation

with several fourth graders, they wished they were eighth grade patrol boys so they could "beat up" those whom they did not like.

Though there was violence within the school, it appeared to reflect the presence of violence in the large cultural milieu. On one occasion when I went to the school, the children were very excited and related that there had just been a murder in front of the school. A man walking on the sidewalk was shot from a passing car. On another occasion, I witnessed the police chasing several fugitives in front of the school and a number of shots were fired. I once observed a very real threat of danger to the kindergarten teacher, as two men came off the street and intruded into the classroom.

> Two men, appearing to be in their early twenties, walk into the classroom and stand by the door. The kindergarten teacher walks over to them and asks what they are doing. They reply that they are watching. She becomes very firm and tells them that they will have to leave the school. At first they refuse to move and she then again says, "I'm asking you to leave or I will call the principal." They then leave the classroom and stand in the hallway. She asks them if either has a pass to be in the building and they state that they do. She asks to see it and they tell her that they aren't going to show it to her. She then goes to the first grade classroom, indicating that she will call the office. The men leave the building and she soon returns to the class. She comments to me that the teachers on the first floor are often bothered by intruders off the street. She states that they are "roughhousers" that are no longer in school and want to cause trouble for the teachers and the students. The kindergarten teacher appears quite disturbed and upset. Before she goes back in front of the class, she states, "It's awfully hard to teach when you have to be policeman too."

With no other means at her disposal, the kindergarten teacher attempted to bluff her way out of the situation and have the men leave without incident. It was a bluff because there was no phone in the first grade classroom by which the teacher could contact the office. There is a two-way communications system in the building but the switch to activate the system is located in the principal's office. The teachers spoke of this type of event on several occasions and expressed anxiety over the lack of security in the school during

class hours. They stated that with each teacher isolated in her room, there was little chance of any teacher being able to perceive if another was in danger.

Patterns of Reciprocity

Attucks School is one sub-unit of a larger organized and structured bureaucratic organization, the city public school system. The school is connected to the larger organization by a series of factors, including financing, curriculum development, teacher training and means of promotion and advancement. There are a series of stated regulations which each of the individual schools in the city must follow and the authority to insure compliance of such regulations lies with the administration of the school system. The individual school appears to reflect in micro-cosm the entire school system in that it also has a series of regulations and rules that must be followed. On this level the principal of the school also must function as one in authority who insures that the regulations and goals of the organization are not disregarded. As Gouldner (1954) and many others have noted, within a bureaucracy and its series of formal regulations and rules there also develops informal norms and patterns of behavior. Thus, in the organization of the individual school, there are present both formal and informal norms governing the patterns of behavior, not only for the students, but also for the teachers and administrators. Perhaps the clearest example observed during the course of the study of the impact of failing to adhere to established norms involved the two principals who were at Attucks School. The first, Mr. Miller, was in the school during the 1967-1968 and 1968-1969 school years. The second, Mr. Elder, assumed responsibilities as the principal on September 1, 1969.

The principal appeared to be placed in the position of having been delegated the responsibility for the school and its functions, but not delegated the authority to insure that the school functions properly. This appeared to be especially the case with the teaching staff. The principal was dependent upon the teachers performing in their roles as teachers and accepting his leadership in order for the school to function. Yet he did not have the formal power to dismiss those teachers who would not comply with his "requests." (The word requests is used advisedly for should he make demands, they may be ignored or challenged, thus creating a direct confrontation as to the exact extent of his authority.) The teachers, on the other hand, appeared to be dependent upon the principal in at least one very crucial area--the disciplining of disruptive students from their classrooms. Regulations stipulated that teachers must request the principal to direct physical punishment against a child. Teachers were not to strike children, but rather such was to be only the prerogative of the principal.

In Attucks School, there appeared to have developed an informal norm of reciprocity whereby the teachers granted legitimacy and leadership to the principal in return for his exercise of discipline against those students who disrupted classes. The exchange of granting legitimacy for the exercise of discipline became the informal mechanism employed by teachers and principal alike to insure the adequate functioning of the school.

During the 1967-1968 school year, the pattern of reciprocity between the principal and the teachers became seriously strained and had nearly been broken by the end of the year. The situation appeared to arise from the teachers' perception that the principal, Mr. Miller, was failing adequately to handle the disruptive students sent from the classrooms to his office.

The teachers claimed that when a disruptive student was sent to the office, Mr. Miller would ask the student involved to have a seat for a period of time in the "bull pen." Occasionally, while the student was seated in the bull pen as punishment, Mr. Miller would ask this same student to do special errands for him in the building. One teacher related that when a student whom she had sent to the office for discipling came back in twenty minutes with a message from the principal, she decided no longer to send any of her students to the office. Such was the case with a number of the other teachers, most notably those from the upper grades. An informal boycott of the office and the wishes of the principal developed among many of the teachers. Such was to be their response to the principal's failure to deal in what they believed to be an adequate manner with the disruptive students. The teachers appeared to believe that Mr. Miller was not providing them with the necessary support to insure that they could teach without disruptions. Thus, the informal norm of reciprocity for a number of the teachers was ignored and they began discipling children within their individual rooms, without the knowledge or permission of the principal. Additional mechanisms employed by the teachers to negate the authority of the principal during the school year included either avoiding or leaving early from staff meetings, failing to participate on committees established by the principal, and not submitting reports to the office by established deadlines.

Within the formal bureaucratic structure of the city public school system there had developed a mechanism whereby the teachers were able to by-pass the principal in the hierarchy of authority within the system and move directly to the supervisor at the district level. As the displeasure of the teachers with Mr. Miller increased, several teachers made known to me in informal conversations that they had expressed their views to the district

office through the district supervisors. When I returned for formal observations in the 1969-1970 school year, I heard on occasion from different teachers how they had placed pressure on the district office to remove Mr. Miller as principal of Attucks School. Mr. Miller was transferred to another school within the district at the end of the 1968-1969 school year. It is not possible to state conclusively that the expressed displeasure of the teachers became the major reason for the transfer, but it may have served as a significant catalyst.

With the presence of the new principal, Mr. Elder, at the school during the 1969-1970 school year, I did not witness the same high incidence of violence by the teachers as in the previous years when Mr. Miller was the principal. The frequency with which the teachers used their rattans upon the children during recess periods was noticeably less. The continual presence of the principal with the children on the playgrounds and his willingness, in the words of one teacher, to "get down with the children instead of always trying to be above them" probably contributed to the decrease in hall violence.

From the informal conversations of the teachers, I am led to believe that the amount of classroom violence had also decreased. The teachers commented repeatedly how well they liked the new principal and how he would handle the discipline problems to their satisfaction. The teachers stated their pleasure on the degree to which he would "back them up" when discipline problems arose. The informal norms of reciprocity appeared to re-emerge quite strongly between the principal and the teachers. The teachers actively complied with the requests of the principal and he, in turn, decisively dealt with disruptive behavior in the classrooms. It is unknown to what degree the teachers and the new principal were able to recognize and verbalize the presence of the patterns of reciprocity within the school. Yet both appeared

to recognize the necessity for such patterns for movement towards the establishment of the exchange began from the first days of school. Teachers sent disruptive students to the office on the first full day of school. Likewise, there was perfect attendance of all teachers at the first five staff meetings called by the principal.

It must be noted, however, that though Mr. Elder began to support the teachers in discipline matters, the threat of violence and punishment was always present in the school. While the acts of violence in the halls decreased considerably, the teachers occasionally still exercised the use of corporal punishment within their individual classrooms. I observed, both in the second grade room of Mrs. Benson and in the fourth grade room of Mrs. Stern, children struck by the teachers.

Within any formal bureaucratic organization there is a need for the development of informal mechanisms to deal with situations and relationships that would otherwise threaten the functioning of that organization itself (Gouldner, 1954). Thus, within Attucks School, the demands upon the principal to supervise the functioning of the school and upon the teachers successfully to impart the necessary material to the students were such that one could not be accomplished apart from the other. The reciprocal patterns developed between the principal and the teachers were based on informal norms governing behavior in two crucial areas related to the continued functioning of the school; the acknowledged leadership and authority of the principal and the perceived necessity to deal by means of physical punishment with disruptive students from the various classrooms.

Exchange of Information

The teachers at Attucks School also developed among themselves a series

of informal norms governing the exchange of information believed of concern to the teachers, either individually or as a group. The most important of the informational exchange norms appeared to center on the belief that a teacher was obliged to share with other teachers pertinent information on classroom organization or classroom control. Though there was the occasional trading of suggestions on methods of discipline, the predominant area in which teachers shared information among one another related to persons believed to be disruptive to the classroom routine, whether it be parents or students. Thus, when a certain student or parent was perceived as disruptive and disagreeable, the teacher would pass this information to the other teachers, most often at either the recess or lunch period. On several occasions, I noted a teacher making a special effort to inform another teacher of a student forthcoming to her class who was labeled as disruptive.

One such student and his family who had received an undesirable reputation by the teachers was David and his mother (mentioned earlier in the comments of the seventh grade teacher, Mrs. Crawford). Between the period of the discussion of David and his mother noted on 9/16/69 and the gathering of the teachers on 10/9/69, David had been transferred to another school. This was done for reasons of "classroom overcrowding," according to the teacher.

> As the gossip about Miss Stern drew to a close, a teacher from the fifth grade came into the room momentarily and told Mrs. Crawford that she had better "be careful" because she had heard that David was being transferred back to Attucks School. Mrs. Crawford commented, "That boy better not come back over here, because if he comes, I go. I've already got Jim and Terry, and if I have David besides, it's all over." The teacher who had come into the room responded, "I'm not sure, but I heard the principal talking about it on the phone." "Girl, I sure hope not," was the reply of Mrs. Crawford.

The informal norm among the teachers to keep one another abreast on matters of concern to them was based on the notion of reciprocity. Regardless of

personal relations, the teachers were expected to share information with the teachers directly affected. At no time did I hear either directly or indirectly that a teacher was deliberately withholding information from another teacher due to either personal animosity or belief that the other teacher had failed on a previous occasion to share information. With the incident noted above, the passing of the information related to the phone call gave the teacher the advantage of having necessary knowledge prior to the occurrence of an event--in this case, the return of David. Being forewarned, the teacher then had the options of speaking to the principal requesting David be placed in a different room or attempting to arrange an exchange with another of the seventh grade teachers for one of their difficult students. A third option for the teacher would, of course, be to argue that due to continued "classroom overcrowding," it would be unfeasible to bring David back into the room.

An Atmosphere for Failure?

To understand the phenomena of academic success or failure among black children in urban ghetto schools, one must look beyond the boundaries of the individual classrooms and examine the social and cultural milieu of the school itself. That is, the various classrooms in which the children spend the majority of time while in the school are not isolated units separate from the influences of the milieu of the school. Both the milieu of the classroom and the milieu of the school appear to sustain one another in a pattern of reinforcement of the presently accepted values and modes of behavior. Thus, the ideology of failure, the presence of violence and control-oriented behavior, patterns of reciprocity, and exchange of information among the teachers are all factors that not only help to establish the

atmosphere of the school, but the individual classrooms as well. Thus, a cyclical effect occurs whereby the milieu of the school influences the learning experiences of the children, which in turn help to define the behavior and responses of the teachers and principal who have major responsibility for the general social themes present in the school.

It is contended that such conditions as the negative expectations for the children, the utilization of violence on the children, the exchange of information among the teachers which allows the development of stereotypes as to performance and behavior, and the norms governing the use of classroom discipline are destructive of a humane and supportative learning milieu. The presence of such conditions may in fact sustain the very forms of behavior and academic performance which the teachers decry. Thus, the principal and the teachers place themselves in the untenable position of reinforcing the failure and withdrawal of the students with patterns of behavior they claim necessary because of the performance of the students.

A further implication of these findings is that so long as the structure and orientation of the ghetto school remains in its present form, one can expect the social and cultural themes discussed in this paper to continue. For example, the very organizational arrangements of the ghetto school sustains the presence of violence due to its being sanctioned for punishment purposes and accepted as legitimate by school officials. The debate within Attucks School was not on whether to use violence, but only when was there validity in its use. This suggests that if there is serious intention of improving the education of black children within the ghetto school, palative measures of "restraining" the use of violence will not be sufficient. Rather, there will have to be a fundamental shift in how children within the school

are viewed. They no longer can be individuals who first and foremost must be "controlled," but rather, they must be respected and most importantly, taught. The use of coercion and violence on children as young as four or five to insure institutional conformity suggests something both about the nature of the institution as well as the regard in which children are held by those who know them incapable to defend themselves.

FOOTNOTES

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2. The names of the school, all staff, administrators and students are pseudonyms. Names are provided to indicate that the discussion relates to living persons, not to fictional characters developed by the author.

3. The author, due to a teaching appointment out of the city, was unable to conduct formal observations in the school and classrooms during the 1968-1969 school year.

4. Smith and Geoffrey (1968) have labeled this method of classroom observation "microethnography."

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